Neo-Nazi crime doubles in Berlin, police chief says

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Berlin (dpa) - The level of violent neo-Nazi crime in the German capital more than doubled over the past year, Berlin's police chief said Friday.

There were 52 reported violent neo-Nazi attacks in 2005 and this year there will be over 100, said police chief Dieter Glietsch in comments to Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa.

Officials are alarmed by growing neo-Nazi violence. Nationwide the level of rightist crime rose by 20 per cent during the first nine months of 2006.

"This is a new development which really fuels concern," said Glietsch.

Far-rightist parties have also won seats in three eastern German regional assemblies.

Glietsch said neo-Nazis had gained confidence following the failure to ban the rightist National Democratic of Germany (NPD) in 2003. Germany's highest court struck down a ban on the NPD which is widely viewed as the best organised of the country's far-right movements.

"Ever since then the right-wing extremists have become more aggressive and less restrained because they apparently feel safer," the Berlin police chief said.

Stressing there were limits to what police could do in the fight against rightists, Glietsch urged German politicians to find a way to ban the NPD.

Germany's domestic security agency, the Verfassungsschutz, says there are about 39,000 organised rightists in Germany - out of a total population of 82 million.

The number of reported rightist crimes in Germany rose to 15,361 in 2005, up from 12,051 in 2004, says the latest Verfassungsschutz report.

Highest levels of neo-Nazi crime on a per capita basis are in economically hard hit Eastern Germany. Saxony-Ahalt state had the largest number of rightist crimes in 2005, followed by Brandenburg and Thuringia, says the report.

Berlin was ranked ninth out of Germany's 16 Laender, the federal states.

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